

# Michigan Freedom Trail Commission Meeting Minutes

11:00 AM, February 17, 2017

Bigelow Room, Michigan History Center  
702 W. Kalamazoo Street, Lansing, MI

**Commissioners Present:** Ronald Brown, Roy Finkenbine, Michael Nassaney, Robin Peebles, David Teeter

**Via Conference Call:** Juanita Moore

**Excused:** Tamara Barnes, Rochelle Danquah, Edwina Murphy

**Absent:** Kim Davis, Earlie Eason

**Visitors:** Lillie Brown, Ypsilanti

**Staff present:** Sandra Clark, Mary Patrick

1. **Call to Order:** Vice-chair Finkenbine called the meeting to order at 11:08 AM.
2. **Agenda:** Nassaney moved to approve the agenda; Teeter seconded the motion, and the agenda was approved unanimously.
3. **Public Comments:** None.
4. **Approval of Minutes:** Noting a correction on page 1, Nassaney moved to approve the December 16, 2016, meeting minutes; Moore seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved with the noted correction.
5. **Action Items:**
  - a. **Draft Annual Report**

The draft annual report was reviewed. Teeter moved to adopt the report with suggested changes; Brown seconded the motion, and the report was adopted. It will now be sent to DNR Director Creagh to forward to the governor.
  - b. **2017 National Network to Freedom Conference**

This year's conference will take place in Maryland on May 18-21. Its theme is "Borderlands." Proposals can still be submitted. Though he cannot attend this year, Finkenbine noted the opportunities for networking, touring and attending the many events. Clark said that the Center can contribute toward travel costs so Michigan has a voice at the conference, and anyone interested in attending should contact Patrick. Because of the close tie-in with the theme, Finkenbine will follow-up with Wayne State University Press about have the *Fluid Frontiers* book at the conference.
  - c. **Network to Freedom (NTF) Nominations**

Nassaney asked for comments on the draft document he previously distributed as a mock nomination of ten sites in Cass County as a driving tour. Finkenbine will follow up with the Detroit Historical Museum about nominating its new underground railroad exhibit. Nassaney said there are potentially other students who could collaborate with other groups of people on nominations. Clark said that Michelle Johnson has identified some potential groups in the community of Niles and suggested that Nassaney check with Johnson on possibilities for collaboration.

The meeting was recessed at this time for the FTC members to tour the Archives of Michigan. The meeting resumed at 12:10 PM.

**d. 2017 Meeting Schedule**

The May meeting will need to be moved. Patrick will send out date options to meet in June. The December meeting will now be held on December 8. A revised schedule will be sent to everyone. Members were encouraged to think of meeting locations that tie in with the commission's work. Finkenbine said he would inquire about the Detroit Historical Museum hosting the June meeting, and perhaps including a visit to the Wright Museum. Patrick will check with Carol Mull for meeting location ideas.

**6. Reports**

**a. Staff:**

Clark reported that Suzanne Fischer has been hired as the Michigan History Center's new museum director. She most recently worked in California and is already deeply involved exhibit planning and development. The next exhibit covers 1815 to 1865, and the FTC will be asked for input. Michelle Johnson has been working with others to find new stories. The center has also been working with Native tribes for their input. Clark also noted that the proposed general fund budget includes money for the center to support the Archives system for long-term preservation of digital materials broadly available to state and local government.

**b. Chairperson:** Finkenbine (written report attached)

**c. Vice Chair:** None

**d. Commissioner Reports:**

Teeter reported that he met with Anise Hayes of Atlantic Impact, who will seek funding to develop a tour of Detroit, then teach high school students to be Detroit cultural tour leaders. FTC members may be contacted for their input. He expects to have more information within the next few months. Brown noted that he has assisted with writing the proposal and training people. Nassaney moved that a letter be sent on behalf of the Freedom Trail Commission in support of the project. It should note that the FTC is looking forward to working with them to highlight the underground railroad in Detroit. Moore seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved. Finkenbine will work with Patrick to write the letter to Atlantic Impact. Teeter also distributed a flyer for "A Convening on the Underground Railroad in Detroit," sponsored by the First Congregational Church. A tentative date has been set, and FTC members are invited to attend.

**e. Standing Committee Updates:**

- Site Identification, Facilities and Programs (Danquah, Nassaney):
- Cultural and Heritage Tourism (Peebles, Teeter): Peebles said a new "content-rich" site at Michigan.org is being developed. Evergreen information is being sought to build the website, and there is a need for 2018 items: tour information, or possible Michigan African-American virtual trails that could link to various institutions where related items can be found (archives, etc.). Nassaney suggested that Pure Michigan include information that targets people coming to Michigan for family reunions, and that perhaps the FTC can assist with the promotion.

- Preservation and Support (Barnes, Turner):
- Education Committee (Barnes, Brown, Finkenbine): Brown distributed a summary of the work he and Finkenbine have done towards a lesson plan for Michigan 8<sup>th</sup> grade social studies teachers. The target date for completion is August 2017. Later they will work on one for college age. The report is attached. Nassaney remarked that developing a curriculum with teacher input is an excellent idea to be sure that it is something that will be used. Clark said that FTC members may be interested in the “Learn” section that will be available on SeekingMichigan.org later this year. It is designed for all ages and can include video, colorful fact sheets, and a Nerd Room for digging deeper and looking at actual documents.

Moore left the meeting at 1:05 PM.

**7. New Business:**

Clark reported that the property surrounding the Watkins house has been purchased by the DNR, but the house is not included. Staff are currently doing research, and there is potential for interpretation that includes the story recorded by Laura Haviland. A free black man lived with the Watkins family and is buried in their family plot. Clark will ask staff to send FTC members a list of the names related to the Watkins Farm that have been found.

**8. News and Announcements:** None.

**9. Adjourn meeting:**

Teeter moved to adjourn the meeting; Brown seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 1:15 PM without objection.

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Sandra S. Clark, Executive Secretary